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'Dangerous business'

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What's behind political killings?

By Thomas B. Ross
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WASHINGTON — President Ford virtually has confessed that the United States has been involved in political assassinations.

At his Thursday press conference, Ford declined to go into any detail but in effect confirmed that he had received report on assassinations from CIA Director William Colby.

"I have had a full report from Mr. Colby," the President declared, "on the operations that have been alluded to in the news media in the last week or so, really involving such actions that might have taken place beginning back in the 1960s."

Ford was referring to reports that Colby had told him the CIA had assassinated — or at least planned to assassinate — foreign leaders.

The President's comments left no doubt that the CIA was involved, but left open the degree of its involvement. In other words, the pertinent questions for congressional investigators have been narrowed to these:

● Did CIA agents actually kill foreign leaders and, if so, did they act on presidential orders or only on instructions from a higher level in the CIA?

● Did the CIA attempt assassinations but fail?

● Did the CIA merely do contingency planning but never carry out the plans?

● Did the CIA withdraw its protection from certain foreign leaders and then look the other way while they were killed by their enemies?

There is evidence that at least two foreign leaders were assassinated in that manner — Dominican Republic dictator Rafael Trujillo in 1961 and South Viet-

namese President Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963.

Henry Dearborn, a retired foreign service officer who was the senior U.S. official in the Dominican Republic when Trujillo died, said the group planning the assassination knew "the United States wasn't going to be unhappy Trujillo was bumped off"

Dearborn said: "I had very good connections with the underground. I did know what was going on."

The fact that the United States was intimately informed about the assassination plot became abundantly clear when Pierre Sainger, President Kennedy's press secretary, goofed and made the first announcement of Trujillo's death.

Diem's assassination followed a similar pattern. The Pentagon papers show the CIA, which had long and close relations with the Diem government, cut him off in 1963 while staying in touch with the generals plotting against him.

Maxwell Taylor, former ambassador to South Vietnam, said: "One of the most serious wrongs, in my judgment was our connivance at the overthrow of President Diem . . . the execution of a coup is not like organizing a tea party; it's very danger-

ous business. So I didn't think we had any right to be surprised when Diem and his brother were murdered."

President Lyndon Johnson expressed the suspicion on several occasions that the United States was directly involved in the Trujillo and Diem assassinations.

Former CIA Director

Richard Helms reportedly assured him in 1965 that the CIA had never been involved in any assassinations. But Helms, who has confessed to giving narrow answers and withholding the whole truth in testimony to Congress, evidently was not asked by Johnson about the possibility of indirect CIA involvement in political killings.

Ford told a group of pri-

vate citizens two months ago that Colby's assassination report could complicate relations with other countries and mar the reputations of past President's if it became public.

Ford reportedly acknowledged that he picked tame men for the Rockefeller Commission on the CIA to make sure it would not become known. Moreover, Ford gave an ambiguous an-

swer when Sen. Frank Church, D-Ida., chairman of the new Senate Intelligence Committee, asked for the report.

releasing the assassination report, at the risk of personal and national embarrassment, or suppressing it, at the risk of being accused of a Watergate-type cover-up.

Ford must chose between